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Address...chairman of the Josephine Shaw Lowell...

[New York]

[1912?]

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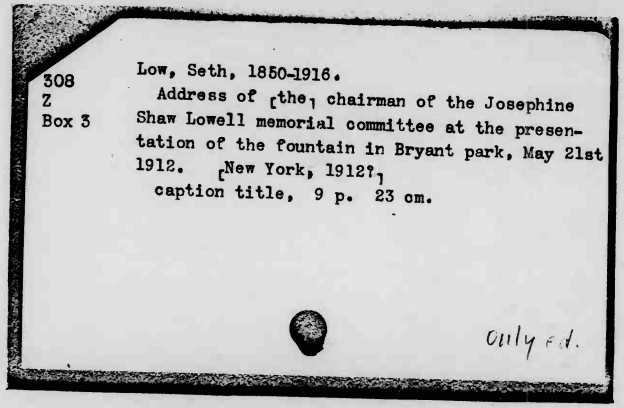
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Address of [the] chairman of the Josephine Shaw Lowell memorial committee at the presentation of the fountain in Bryant park, May 21st 1912. [New York, 1912?]
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ADDRESS OF SETH LOW

Chairman of the Josephine Shaw Lowell Memorial Committee

AT THE

PRESENTATION OF THE FOUNTAIN IN BRYANT PARK

MAY 21st, 1912

MR. MAYOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

A large company of men and women who have caught inspiration from the shining life of Josephine Shaw Lowell have united to erect this Fountain in her memory. On their behalf, and as their spokesman, it is my privilege to present this Fountain to the City; and to ask you, Mr. Mayor, on behalf of the City, to accept it and to keep it as among the City's most precious things. For this Fountain is the memorial of a life wholly dedicated to the service of humanity, lived here with noble simplicity before our own eyes in the City of New York. There are few if any here, who cannot vividly recall this stately woman, as she moved along our streets, clothed always in black, whose countenance of rare nobility was at once comfort and inspiration wherever it was seen. Dr. Adler, at the memorial meeting held shortly after her death, spoke of Mrs. Lowell as the "Lady of the Lamp," and indeed that was a most happy description; for Mrs. Lowell with her strong, clear intellect, illuminated every human problem with which she dealt. This she was able to do because she had mastered them all in

the light of a sympathetic understanding, born of her own acquaintance with grief; so that the lamp of her Spirit, in giving light, never failed to shed warmth also wherever it went. Indeed it would be hard to say whether, of these two, warmth or light, predominated in her character. The wonderfully blended result was a woman who was both honored and beloved by all sorts and conditions of men.

Mrs. Lowell was appointed by Governor Tilden in 1876 a member of the New York State Board of Charities. She was the first woman appointed in this State to such an office. During her thirteen years of service in this Board she splendidly illustrated the value of such service by women, and she demonstrated the immense influence which one capable, brave, and sagacious woman can wield in a Commonwealth like ours. Nor was her influence a thing of a day. The effect of it is written deep in the legislation of the State of New York. Before this, Mrs. Lowell had won her spurs in the State Charities Aid Association, under the inspiring leadership of Miss Louisa Lee Schuyler, whose dauntless and unwearying banner she followed, then and later, in many a struggle to improve the work of relief carried on by our State. This organization, the State Charities Aid Association, was an outgrowth from the Sanitary Commission which did such notable service in caring for the sick and wounded during the Civil War. It goes without saying that Mrs. Lowell, even before her marriage, had thrown herself heart and soul into the work for the Soldiers from the moment of the outbreak of hostilities.

As was natural, Mrs. Lowell, as Commissioner of Charities, gave her first attention to improving the treatment of women who came for any reason under public control. She perceived, what at this day it is hard to realize, that then women and men were mingled in public

16 March 1915 111

institutions in a way that the sentiment of our day—a sentiment which she herself did much to create—would not for a moment tolerate. The effect of her burning indignation and intrepid zeal is to be found first, in the reformatories for women at Hudson, Albion and Bedford. Then she came, like a veritable Joan of Arc, to the support of Miss Schuyler, in her triumphant effort to humanize the care of the insane. The State care of the insane, which was thus brought about in the State of New York, has replaced conditions that are now unbelievable, by care so good that in some respects it is a model for the world. Then Mrs. Lowell's tender heart was attracted by the hopelessness of the feeble-minded, when they were only tolerated, as they used to be, among others dependent on public aid. So, once more, she led the charge, on behalf of these feeble kinsfolk of us all, against the ranks of ignorance and indifference until these too were put to rout. The Custodial Asylum at Newark is the permanent memorial of this victory. Then she struggled, side by side with Mrs. Abbey Hopper Gibbons, President of the Woman's Prison Association of the City of New York, for the appointment of Police Matrons, and again she succeeded. All this time she worked, as she worked always, for the better treatment of dependent children.

During her life she wrote and spoke much on the subject of outdoor relief, its demoralizing character, and its unsatisfactory results. She recognized that, in times of stress, it might be necessary; but her constant teaching was that not by alms but by personal help and friendship could the needy be made self-respecting and self-supporting. Out of this strong and central article of her faith came her active leadership in the establishment of the Charity Organization Society, which for so many years, under the presidency of Robert W. de Forest, has been a blessing to the City of New York. Mrs. Lowell never

for a moment dreamed that organization could take the place of the spirit of brotherhood in the service of those who may need help; but she perfectly understood that under modern conditions, a man might as easily find his own letters in the Post Office, without organization, as, without organization, anyone, however well disposed, can hope to be useful to the great army of the needy in a city like this.

In 1889, to the surprise and regret of many of her friends, Mrs. Lowell voluntarily retired from the State Board of Charities. Her motive was characteristic. She retired, not because she had lost interest in relief work in any of its forms, but because she wanted to have more time to give to the study of the relations of capital and labor. "Five hundred thousand wage-earners there were," she said, "in the City of New York alone, two hundred thousand of them women, and seventy-five thousand of those working, under dreadful conditions, for starvation wages." "That is more vital," she added, "than the twenty-five thousand dependents, counting the children." Thus with a prescience shared by few in those days, Mrs. Lowell perceived that it was better worth while to prevent people, adults or children, from becoming dependent, than to try to mitigate their lot after they had become dependent. With the courage of a Bayard, she wrote a public letter to the *New York Tribune,* in 1892, in which she maintained that the strikers at Homestead were "rebels and revolutionists against existing industrial conditions; that legally they were wrong; that morally they were right; that intellectually they might be either right or wrong." The theory for which they were contending, she pointed out, is "that the man who by his labor for a series of years helps to build up a great business, be it factory, mine or railroad, thereby acquires a distinctive right of property in that business, while

the general view is, that it is only the man who helps to build up his business by his money who has a property right in it." Evidently here are two conflicting conceptions in regard to the fundamental basis of modern industry. Can a property right be created only by money; or can it also be created by the labor of those whose labor helps to make an industry wealth-producing? The twenty years that have passed since Mrs. Lowell penned this notable letter have tended to emphasize and not to terminate the conflict between these two views. Those who hold the second view, point out that it is a mistake to look upon wealth-producing industry in the same light as employment which takes the form of personal service. I summarize as to this point a paper by the late Mrs. Mary Putnam Jacobi, which is quoted at length in William Rhinelander Stewart's admirable life of Mrs. Lowell. The whole paper is well worth reading. Mrs. Jacobi calls attention to the fact that, in the census, physicians, lawyers, clergymen, architects, and the like are classified with nurses, coachmen, gardeners, and cooks, because all alike render some sort of personal service which in itself does not make the person who receives it richer, and which is evidently paid for out of the capital of the person who receives it. On the other hand, she points out, employment in a money-making industry, under modern conditions at any rate, reverses this situation at almost every point. The element of personal contact between the employer and the employe disappears, and the fund from which the employe is paid is not so much the capital of the employer as the earnings of the business which the employe as well as the employer helps to create. So much for Mrs. Jacobi's argument. It is safe to say that the world has not yet seen the last of the results that are likely to flow from this fundamental change in the conception, on the part of

workingmen, of their relations to wealth-producing enterprises. To quote Mrs. Lowell again: "This is why * * * workingmen on strike refuse, so long as they can, to allow other men to come in and take possession of what they call, to the scornful amusement of their employers, 'their places.'" I suppose there is no subject upon which thoughtful men and women, all over the world, can reflect to-day more profitably than upon this modern conception of the workingman, that his labor gives him a property interest in any wealth-producing enterprise which his labor helps to create. If it is not true, why is it not true? And if it is true, to what extent is it true, and how can it be, and how should it be, recognized? When these questions have been answered, and answered rightly, a new industrial era will have dawned.

It was a logical outcome of Mrs. Lowell's interest in all questions relating to labor, that she should have been active in the formation of the Consumers' League, now and for many years under the able leadership of Mrs. Frederick Nathan. Of this organization, Mrs. Lowell was the first President, and from that day to this it has been active and influential in improving the conditions under which women are called upon to work in the City of New York. This fruitful movement for the improvement of working conditions for women and girls has resulted in the formation of seventy-four similar leagues in other States and cities of the Union, and also of The National Consumers' League, which aims to abolish the sweatshop, child labor, long hours of work, starvation wages, and unhygienic environment.

The public spirit which flamed in Mrs. Lowell's breast led her also to organize the Woman's Municipal League, a body which also still remains to testify, by its history and present usefulness under Mrs. Edward R. Hewitt's skilful guidance, to the foresight that led Mrs. Lowell to

be active in its formation. In grateful remembrance of her activity, the League publishes a monthly bulletin which states upon its face that the League was founded in 1897 by Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell. Better foundation than this no movement could have that is designed to advance the public welfare.

It would be idle to attempt to follow into every detail the activities of this inspiring and useful life. Enough has been said, Mr. Mayor, to justify Josephine Shaw Lowell's right to be commemorated in this public place, by this beautiful fountain erected through the joint action of the City itself and of her friends. Thanks to the skill of the Architect, Mr. Charles A. Platt, whose service has been rendered as a labor of love, this fountain is itself beautiful; and it is besides a beautiful symbol of the refreshment which Mrs. Lowell brought to people all about her who were thirsting for a nobler life. Its presence in this public park, happily typifies that this refreshing went out from her because it was her nature to give it; and that it was given to all alike, rich and poor, but especially to those who needed it most.

My office to-day would be imperfectly fulfilled, if I did not refer for a moment to the fire in which this noble nature was refined. Whatever dross there may have been in Josephine Shaw Lowell's character, was burned out of it in the consuming fire of patriotism that saved this Union in the fateful days of the Civil War. A young girl of only eighteen when Sumter was fired upon, she wrote in her diary, there and then, that she and others like her must always be different as long as they lived, because of the sacrifices which they perceived being made on every hand, to preserve the Union. She wrote in her diary, in another place: "We never knew before how much we loved our Country." The monument to her Brother, Colonel Shaw, who fell in the attack on Fort

Wagner, one of the defences of Charleston, stands, as you know, on the edge of the Boston Common. It is more than a coincidence that Sister and Brother alike have so entwined themselves into the history of this Nation, as to be similarly commemorated, the one in Boston, the other in New York. There is another memorial of Colonel Shaw, of which I always like to speak, for fewer know of this second memorial than should. There is in the City of Charleston, South Carolina, and there has been for more than thirty years maintained there as a part of the Public School System of Charleston, the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial School for Negroes. In this School, over the head of the Principal, hangs the picture of Colonel Shaw, draped in the American Flag; and at the farther end of the room is a photograph of the monument to him on the Boston Common. This School was originally built by friends of Colonel Shaw, soon after the War. In the days of Reconstruction it was accepted as a part of the Public School System, and there it has remained until this day. I delight in the magnanimity of the people of Charleston, which has led them thus to pay their tribute of honor also, in this fine way, to a brave and a true patriot. It is upon such enduring foundations as actions like this, worthy at once of the people of Charleston and of the State of South Carolina, that our "imperishable Union of indissoluble States" now firmly rests.

In the third year of the War, Mrs. Lowell married Colonel Charles Russell Lowell, an officer of cavalry in the Union Army, who, for gallantry and efficient service, was promoted to be Brigadier General on the very day on which he received his fatal wound. He fell in action, under Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley. "I do not think there was a quality", said Sheridan of him, "which I could have added to Lowell. He was the perfection of a man and a Soldier." Thus it was

that Mrs. Lowell received her baptism for the life of devoted service, the sweet and enduring fruits of which we commemorate to-day. As we look back, and think of what the Country had already demanded of her when she was little more than twenty years of age, we are tempted to exclaim that she had already given all she had. But Josephine Shaw Lowell had then only begun to give. For more than fifty years she continued to give lavishly everything that was in her, time and service and all her wealth of mind and heart, to the people of this Country for whom she as bravely and cheerfully lived, as her Husband and Brother had bravely and cheerfully died. This is the manner of woman, Mr. Mayor, of whom this sparkling fountain will beautifully sing; and its song shall be like the song of The Brook; and like the song of her own triumphant Spirit, "Men may come, and men may go; but I go on forever."

> Who for their fellows live and die
> They the immortals are. O sigh
> Not for their loss, but rather praise
> The God that gave them to our days.
>
> —*Gilder.*

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